



Montana Department of LABOR & INDUSTRY

Division: Workforce Services Division

Category: WIOA

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Policy No.: 18-18

Credentials Policy

Background: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires the State Workforce Innovation Board (SWIB) to increase credential attainment by Montana's job seekers. Identifying and obtaining credentials assists job seekers to acquire and document the skills and competencies needed for quality, in-demand occupations, while meeting the workforce development needs of local business communities. Credentials also serve as a key signal to businesses that they are hiring qualified individuals. Credential attainment offers job seekers, businesses, and their local communities opportunities for economic growth and stability.

Scope: This policy applies to all service providers operating WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker or National Dislocated Worker Grants (DWG) and/or Youth; Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA); and Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) programs; WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker or DWG, Youth, TAA, or JVSG program managers; WIOA fiscal officers; and the WIOA monitoring team. This policy is effective **pending SWIB approval**.

Policy:

A. WIOA Definition

- A recognized postsecondary credential is awarded in recognition of an individual's attainment of measurable technical or industry/occupations skills necessary to obtain employment or advance within that industry or occupation.
- Before being counted as a successful outcome, participants who obtain a secondary school diploma or the equivalent must also meet the additional condition of employment or enrollment in education or training leading to a postsecondary credential within one year following exit.
- A secondary school diploma that is recognized by the state and is included for accountability purposes under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). A secondary school equivalency certification documents that a student has completed the requirements of a high school education. Examples of secondary school diplomas, alternate diplomas, and recognized equivalents recognized by the states include:
 - Obtaining certification of attaining passing scores on a state-recognized high school equivalency test;
 - Earning secondary school diplomas, alternate diplomas, and recognized equivalent through a credit bearing secondary education program sanctioned by state law, code or regulation;
 - Obtaining certification of passing a state-recognized, competency-based assessment; and
 - Completion of a specified number of college credits.

- The participant must be employed or enrolled in education or training that leads to a postsecondary credential within one year following exit.

B. Credential Types

1. Educational Diplomas, Degrees, and Certificates

- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Educational certificate
- Secondary school diploma

2. Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) Certificates of Completion

- Registered Apprenticeship Program Certificates of Completion
- Interim credentials

3. Occupational Licenses

- Issued by government entities

4. Certifications

- Industry or professional association, product vendor, etc.

5. Other

- Recognized certificates of industry or occupational skills completion sufficient to qualify for entry-level or advancement in employment

C. Characteristics of Credentials

Four characteristics strengthen the value of credentials to individuals and businesses:

1. Industry Recognition

2. Stackability

- A sequence of credentials accumulated over time to build up a job seeker's qualifications.
- Assists job seekers to move along a career pathway or up a career ladder to different and potentially higher-wage jobs.

3. Portability

- Recognized and accepted as supporting the qualifications an individual in other settings, for example: geographical locations across the country; educational institutions; or other industries or businesses..
- RAP Certificates of Completion.

4. Accreditation

- By an independent, quality-review body is a valuable attribute and is often required for education institutions so that students may be eligible for federal financial aid. For example:
- An institution of higher education, including those formally controlled, sanctioned, or chartered by the governing body of an Indian tribe (s);
- Community college;
- A State agency responsible for vocation or technical education; or
- A specific education program, such as one approved by the Department of Veteran Affairs, offering education benefits to veterans and other eligible individuals.
- Some credentials offered by industry or professional associations or product vendors may not be accredited. In that case, please consider the following additional markers of quality or labor market value:
 - Industry-wide recognition;
 - Professional association acceptance; or
 - Local demand.

D. Identifying Relevant Credentials

Providers should make sure that credentials count toward the WIOA primary indicators of performance in the following ways, that:

- The training program is offered by an organization or institution that awards postsecondary credentials;
- The credential results in industry-wide, measurable technical or industry/occupation skills; and
- The training is one of the following:
 - Occupational skills training including training for nontraditional employment and for training programs operated by the private sector; (requires ETP)
 - Training programs operated by the private sector; (requires ETP)
 - Skill upgrading and retraining; (requires ETP)
 - Entrepreneurial training; (requires ETP)
 - Adult education and literacy activities provided in combination with services described in any clauses (i) through (vii) of WIOA Section 134 (d)(4); (does not require ETP)
 - Registered Apprenticeship
- The secondary school diploma meets [the WIOA definition](#) provided in section A.

E. Documentation

- All training services must be clearly identified and expectations for earning a credential must be stated in the participant's Individual Service Strategy, Individual Employment Plan, Individualized Plan for Employment, or PEP Talk.
 - The participant must understand that once training begins, he or she is expected to complete all requirements.
 - If the participant fails to complete the entire program, program personnel must not report a credential.
- Service providers must include supporting documentation in the participant's file. Please refer to the [WIOA Data Validation Policy and the Federal Required Source Documentation Attachment](#).

Monitoring and Technical Assistance:

- A formal monitoring will be conducted by the entity designated by SWIB.
- Technical assistance will be provided by the Program Managers and Reporting Analyst.

References:

- [TEGL 10-16. Change 1 Performance Accountability Guidance](#)
- [TEGL 14-18 Aligning Performance Accountability Reporting, Definitions, and Policies](#)
- [TEN 25-19 Understanding Postsecondary Credentials in the Public Workforce System](#)